

AFRICA AND THE PROCESS OF 'UNDEVELOPMENT'



Neo-liberal Globalisation and Its Social Consequences

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Pambazuka News 165, 15 July 2004

THE ACCELERATED PROCESSES of globalisation that have characterised the last decade and a half in world history and the forces and interests that have emerged to dominate and propel them have brought to the fore a broad range of issues and concerns that touch directly on global and local-level equity and justice both generally as they pertain to the developmental experience and more specifically as they are being played out in the social sectors of which health and education occupy a place of prime importance.

Although, at one level, globalisation appears to promise a great deal of opportunity for progress and advancement, the process, in the way in which it has been shaped in the contemporary period, has also been accompanied, at another level, by a sharpening of socio-economic disparities and inequalities among nations and within countries. Evidence suggests that the main winners from globalisation represent a small and diminishing minority even as millions, including many who once formed part of or aspired to the middle class, have been pushed to the bottom of the social ladder into poverty and misery.

A plethora of explanations have been advanced as to why the process of globalisation has not been accompanied by social gains and has, instead, resulted in the erosion of some of the achievements recorded in an earlier phase of development. While some scholars point to the fact that the current experience of globalisation is driven by the narrow concerns of international financial investors with a strong short-term, speculative orientation that is inimical to the overall interests of the working poor and the real sectors of economies, others have suggested that the problems that have arisen are traceable directly to the neo-liberal ideological principles and doctrinal foundations on the basis of which the process of globalisation is being governed and which has resulted in the enthronement of a narrow and limiting market logic in the policy process.

There is clearly some truth in the various competing explanations which have been offered as to why the problem of inequality would seem to have worsened on the back of globalisation. But over and above these is the question of the state, particularly in the developing countries, and the erosion and delegitimisation not only of its role in the developmental process but also the erosion of its broad policy planning and implementational capacities at the same time as the efforts at supplanting it with the private sector and/or non-governmental organisations have failed to live up to expectations.

When this is taken together with the fact that in the African context, the free market orientation of policy premised on deflationary macro-economic principles has failed to deliver growth and has instead widened the boundaries of poverty, it is easy to begin to understand why the problems of inequality and injustice have worsened. It is here, in my view, that the problem ought to be located in the first place.

The Making of the Post-Colonial African State and Social Policy

The state, whether in developed or developing countries, played an important historical role as a social actor. The high point of the development of the social state came in the period immediately after the Second World War with the emergence and spread of different variants of social democratic and welfare regimes in response both to popular domestic pressures by the working poor in Europe and as a direct response to the challenge of an ascendant socialism/communism most eloquently symbolised by the Bolshevik Revolution and its initial spread across Eastern Europe and Asia.

The post-war context of the consolidation of the social state coincided with the period of late colonialism which also witnessed for the first time in the colonial experience, a deliberate and conscious investment of effort in the promotion of 'development' which included greater attention to the promotion of infrastructure, the nurturing of local industrial processing and the expansion of health and educational facilities and expenditure.

At independence, African states were, not surprisingly, invested with broad-ranging social responsibilities which were integral to the anti-colonial social contract on the basis of which the nationalist politicians mobilised the populace for the independence struggle. Central to the contract was the promise of the expansion of social policy in a direction which would significantly improve the health and nutritional status of the populace, expand access to education and offer greater opportunities for employment. African countries succeeded in varying degrees in achieving the goals which they defined: in the period to 1980, the livelihood prospects of the populace were generally improved – life expectancy maintained an upward trend even as child and maternal mortality showed improvements.

The expansionary economic policies which African governments pursued in

the 1960s and 1970s had a great deal to do with the successes which they recorded. With growth rates averaging 5 to 7 per cent and star economic performers like Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya clocking up to 9 per cent average growth rates, it was possible to expand the social expenditure of the state particularly with regard to health and education. Policy was geared to promote the inclusiveness of marginal groups and subsidies were employed to improve the reach and coverage of the educational and health targets of the state.

To be sure, the post-colonial model of social policy formulation and implementation was not without its problems and some of the problems were to become sources of dysfunctionality that eventually weakened the effectiveness of policy and, finally, the onset of socio-economic crises. Still, in comparison to the poor growth records of the 1980s and 1990s, the 1960s and 1970s seemed like golden years.

The Onset of Economic Crisis and the Age of Orthodoxy

The onset of the African economic crisis at the beginning of the 1980s triggered attacks on the social policies of the post-colonial state. While for most African governments, the immediate, almost instinctive response which they had to the crisis in their economies was to curb social expenditures as the core of the austerity measures which they adopted, this attack on the social sectors was carried further and transformed into a dogma in the context of International Monetary Fund(IMF)/World Bank structural adjustment which had a deflationary, market-oriented thrust that saw and treated the post-colonial state as the problem and not a part of the solution.

The economic crisis management and reform strategy promoted by the IMF and the World Bank drew heavily from an ascendant global neo-liberalism which was one-sidedly anti-state and which was committed to 'freeing' the forces of the market under the banner of 'getting prices right', curbing inflation, and promoting the private and/or non-state sector. The consequences of this crisis management strategy were many and devastating from the point of view of the health sector and the health status of the average Africa.

The shift in the structure of incentives which the structural adjustment framework represented and which consisted of efforts at shifting the locus of developmental activities away from the state to market also triggered a brain drain from the social sectors generally and the public health system in particular even as freshly qualified health personnel roamed the streets in many countries unable to find gainful employment.

The immediate post-colonial health system definitely had many problems but there was also a clear vision which underpinned it and which sought to improve livelihood and well-being. During the crisis and adjustment years, this vision was lost and the alternative that seemed to replace it was preoccu-

pired primarily with winning the battle to roll back the frontiers of the state and enthrone the market.

Little initial attention was paid to ways in which the health gains that had been recorded in the lead up to and immediately after independence could be safeguarded. The consequence was that a chaotic situation prevailed in many countries in which the public health system was in a state of collapse and mired in all-round shortages of personnel, equipment and medicaments while the private/non-governmental health system, such as it existed, proved to be inadequate in many ways even as its services were priced beyond the reach of the working poor.

The decline which was registered in the health status of the average African was dramatic and alarming; diseases which were previously under control or which were well on the way to elimination resurfaced while life expectancy suffered reversals as maternal and infant mortality grew at the same time as the nutritional status of many households declined. The wider framework of economic reform and structural adjustment which was being pursued had clearly taken a toll on the health sector and combined with developments in the health system itself to send alarm bells ringing. Across Africa and the rest of the world, the case began to be made for adjustment with a human face.

The pleas for the modulation of economic reforms in order to give adjustment a human face led to the introduction of a series of interventions which came under the rubric of the social dimensions of adjustment. Overall, most of these programmes failed to achieve the objectives for which they were introduced and there is no greater evidence of this than the worsening of the problems of growing exclusion that they were supposed to help tackle.

The shallowness of the interventions was brought into sharp relief by the outbreak of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which the social dimensions of adjustment were simply unable to address and which accelerated at a time when the capacity of the state and of the public health system had been severely eroded.

Beyond Structural Adjustment and Towards the Social State

One of the fundamental lessons from the failure of the social dimensions of structural adjustment to have an effect, and a factor which is equally relevant for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) which have been put in place across Africa during the last two years, is that no progressive policy of social advancement can be successful if it is treated as a residual category to serve targeting needs while the 'serious' business of macro-economic policy-making is carried on without a clear social objective in mind.

To be truly effective, social policy must be an integral part of macro-economic policy-making, not a residual add-on. This can only be done if there is a conscious effort to avoid the decoupling of social policy from macro-economic policy formulation as has happened over the last two decades. Such

an approach will require, as necessary, the harmonisation of economic policies and instruments with the goal of social renewal and advancement built on foundations of equity and justice.

For macro-economic policy-making to succeed in advancing the frontiers of social policy in a manner that is equitable, just and inclusive, it would also require to generate growth without which it will not be possible to expand expenditure. The tragedy for Africa is that the structural adjustment years were characterised by a policy orthodoxy which, by its deflationary logic, stifled growth.

The quest for a social state will necessarily, therefore, involve a revisiting of the macro-economic fundamentals that inform policy with a view to effecting a radical shift from a growth-retarding orthodoxy to a growth-promoting heterodoxy. In sum, the rebirth of a social state in Africa will also simultaneously involve a re-thinking of policy in a direction that could promote what some have conceptualised as developmental democracies on the continent.



How Africa Develops Europe (and the Rest of the Rich World): Real Development and Aid

Antoinette Ntuli

Pambazuka News 139, 15 January 2004

INCREASINGLY ATTENTION is being given to documenting the extent to which Africa (and the rest of the developing world) is in fact providing development aid, as opposed to being a recipient of aid. This aid is being provided in myriad ways including financial relations, subsidising ecological resources, provision of ready trained skilled labour and, increasingly, providing holiday resorts of unbeatable value.

The slave trade was the most visceral manifestation of the ongoing exploitative relationship between Africa and the rich world. The haunting images of manacled Africans toiling in the cotton fields of the USA have now been replaced with images of starvation, war, brutality, fecklessness and HIV. These graphic images, beamed throughout the world, perpetuate a sense of need and dependence that serves the purposes of powerful and wealthy states. Such images make it easy to believe that Africa both requires and could benefit from Western aid. This however belies the real relationship between Africa and the West. In reality, in order to understand Africa's relationship with the developed world, it is important to look at figures which show that, far from contributing nothing to the economy of developed countries and taking everything in return, Africa's contribution to developed countries could be considered as its own form of development aid.

According to Jubilee Research the accumulated external debt of the world's richest country, the USA, is \$2.2 trillion – almost the same as the \$2.5 trillion owed by the entire developing world including India, China and Brazil. They calculate that this means that every American citizen owes the rest of the world \$7,333 while every citizen of all the developing countries only owes the rest of the world \$500. Meanwhile the poor are financing the debt of the developed world, as capital flows from poor countries, helping to lower rich countries interest rates and inflate the value of their currencies, enable them to purchase goods from the rest of the world far more cheaply than they would otherwise have been able to do.

Jubilee Research have also quantified the economic damage attributable to natural disasters arising from climate change as being more than \$300 billion per annum. Industrialised countries (at least historically) are almost entirely responsible for human driven global warming although 96 per cent of all deaths from natural disasters occur in developing countries. The value of eco-

conomic output built on growing 'carbon debt' (in which carbon debt is calculated according to the amount by which a country exceeded its fair share in the emission of greenhouse gasses) attributable to the G7 countries, was estimated as being in the region of \$13–15 trillion for a typical year in the 1990s – while the conventionally indebted poor countries had a carbon credit that could be valued at three times their orthodox debt. Thus if this concept of debt is used, the developing world is subsidising the rich world and should perhaps be considering what structural adjustment processes the rich world needs to put in place in order to meet their debt repayments.

The UNDP calculated that by 1987 nearly one third of Africa's skilled people had moved to Europe – Sudan lost 17 per cent of doctors and dentists, 20 per cent of university teaching staff, 30 per cent of engineers and 45 per cent of surveyors in 1978; 60 per cent of Ghanaian doctors trained in the early 80s are now abroad; and Africa as a whole is thought to have lost up to 60,000 middle and high level managers between 1985 and 1990. This reverse subsidy seems set to continue. Some estimates indicate that mechanistic and flawed developed country staff forecasting needs mean that the USA, for example, will require one million additional nurses in the next ten years to meet its shortfall.

Writers on human resources such as Bundred and Martineau put the cost of training a GP as US\$60,000, calculating a reverse subsidy from the developing world of US\$500m per annum just for health personnel. In South Africa alone, the loss of more than 82,000 skilled personnel over an eight-year period between 1989 and 1997 is estimated to have cost the country US\$5 billion. UNCTAD quantified US savings of US\$3.86 billion in training costs as a result of importing 21,000 Nigerian doctors over a ten-year period.

Central to these startling statistics are structural adjustment programmes. Rather than providing restitution for the period of formal occupation of African countries that took place between the 1880s and 1960s, the West channelled large sums of monies into newly independent African countries through massive bank loans. In the process a number of banks became severely stretched. With the 1980s came an intense period of structural adjustment programmes, the immediate objective of which, according to Walden Bello, was to rescue banks that had become overextended; the longer-term objective was to further integrate Southern countries into the North dominated world economy. Although initially few countries were keen to take structural adjustment loans, as more and more countries ran into difficulty servicing the huge debts made to them, so they had no option but to 'structurally adjust'.

Structural adjustments demanded that, as a pre-condition to receiving aid, developing countries open their markets to globalisation and privatise their utilities such as water and electricity services. Among the other requirements were tightening of state expenditure and devaluation of currencies resulting in an end to free health and education and dramatic cut backs in these services.

The withdrawal of resources for education and health initiated a cycle of deprivation in which working conditions, including salaries deteriorated, triggering an exodus of staff and further debilitating the services. Simultaneously, funding of academic training institutions was reduced, and there was a concurrent flight of intellectuals and decimation of institutions of higher learning. Philip Altbach calculates that roughly 1.5 million students (most of whom leave the South to study in the North) study in countries outside their own, and a significant number do not return.

The net effect has been to strip countries of a significant component of their social capital and create a vacuum of skill, conveniently providing jobs for highly trained Westerners (to be paid for in hard currency) and simultaneously the conditions for Africa to be reduced to providing technical level education and producing a workforce only fit to do the dirty jobs of the rich world.

And just as there seems to be broad agreement that structural adjustment has not been beneficial to Africa, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is ready and poised to fill the gap. The combined worth of health and education markets is estimated to be US\$5 trillion according to Bertrand and Kalafatides. If the major proponents of GATS have their way, all these services will be up for grabs by powerful transnational corporations, and the right of African states to provide these common goods will be emasculated.

What the figures above show is that, combined with conditions like structural adjustment and GATS, the cycle of development aid from Africa to Europe and the rest will be continued. For African intellectuals, students, political activists and Africanists everywhere this signals a call for international solidarity of the kind inspired by the anti-apartheid movement – as a countervailing force against the new world order that compels Africa to continue to feed the bloated stomach of greed.



World Debt Day: Who Owes Whom?

Interview with Demba Moussa Dembele

Pambazuka News 156, 13 May 2004

THOSE CAMPAIGNING AGAINST Third World debt have long argued that crippling levels of debt have been a severe block to the development of African countries, causing widespread poverty and hardship. Six years ago, over 70,000 Jubilee 2000 supporters formed a human chain in Birmingham to call for the cancellation of the debts of some of the world's poorest nations. To mark this occasion, World Debt Day on 16 May is intended to call attention to the ongoing debt crisis, provide a global rallying point for all those who continue to care about the suffering being caused by debt and encourage campaigners by providing an opportunity for action and advocacy. *Pambazuka News* emailed a list of questions to Demba Moussa Dembele, Director of the Forum for African Alternatives in Senegal, to gauge where Africa stands in the debt stakes.

Pambazuka: Why should people care about World Debt Day?

Dembele: The day commemorates one of the largest gatherings ever held to call world attention to the impact of the Debt Crisis. It was on 16 May 1998, during the G7 Summit in Birmingham (UK) that the call on Western and Japanese leaders to cancel poor countries' debt went out. That day was a turning point in the Jubilee 2000 Campaign and helped put the debt issue on centre stage.

Pambazuka: Briefly, what is the impact of the current levels of debt on the development of African countries?

Dembele:

- Sub-Saharan Africa's debt accounts for 71 per cent of its GDP
- The debt represents more than 180 per cent of exports
- Debt service absorbs 12–13 per cent of exports receipts on average
- Accumulated arrears (debt service that could not be paid) represents more than 30 per cent of current debt levels
- Since 1988, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is getting very little in terms of new loans. A greater part of some of the loans we hear about is used to service old debts
- Unsustainable debt deters foreign direct investments.

Pambazuka: If the negative effects of unsustainable debt are so well documented, why are the debt-collecting institutions and countries so reluctant to intervene in an area of such obvious importance?

Dembele:

- The debt bondage is the new face of colonialism or even slavery
- Debt is used as an instrument of domination: it is at the heart of the unequal power relations between the North and the South. It is also an instrument used to plunder and exploit indebted countries' resources
- Debt is an instrument of resource transfer from the South to the North. In 2002, according to the UN, net transfers from the South to the North were estimated at \$200 billion. During the four previous years, net transfers from the South amounted \$120 billion a year
- The IMF and the World Bank use debt as a tool to impose their disastrous policies. Without that tool they would have a very limited or no influence in Africa or elsewhere.

Pambazuka: Many people point to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) as evidence that something is being done to resolve the debt crisis. Others argue that the HIPC is a sham and has not led to significantly improved levels of debt relief. In your opinion, what progress has been made and what more needs to be done?

Dembele:

- So far 11 countries, including nine in sub-Saharan Africa, have achieved the completion point. But almost all of these countries did not have 'sustainable' debt levels as the World Bank predicted in its debt sustainability analysis (DSA)
- The amount of debt 'cancelled' for these countries is minimal compared to their overall debt. It is less than 20 per cent
- At this pace, it would take a quarter century to see all eligible countries achieve the completion point
- The only solution to the debt crisis is total debt cancellation. Nothing less.

Pambazuka: Many have claimed that much of the debt owed by African countries (for example, the apartheid debt owed by South Africa) is illegitimate and that in actual fact, Western countries owe Africa for centuries of exploitation. Is this view gaining ground?

Dembele: Since the World Conference on Racism in Durban (South Africa) in 2001, the issue of reparations has been accepted by world public opinion. Of course, some European countries and the United States have shunned the conference for fear of being exposed. However, the idea is gaining ground every day. In Africa, more and more voices – intellectuals, policy-makers, activists, etc – use every opportunity to remind the world, especially the West, that it is Africa that is owed an immeasurable debt. In addition, the work of Jubilee South – the international debt network – and other national or regional networks has helped promote the idea of reparations in various forms.

Pambazuka: What's stopping African countries from simply defaulting on their debt and channelling the resources into health and education?

Dembele:

- Many African leaders are beholden to the West. They are afraid of standing up to them
- In addition, these leaders are afraid of challenging the World Bank and the IMF. Some of them are even afraid of supporting the call for debt cancellation. I remember a former Tanzanian finance minister saying in Washington, DC, that his country does not support the idea of multilateral debt cancellation because this would 'kill the goose that lays the golden eggs'
- Collective debt repudiation is a political decision. At this juncture, it is not easy to see a unified political position that would support debt repudiation. But civil society organisations are working on it. We think that by exposing the hypocrisy and bad faith of bilateral and multilateral creditors and showing the disastrous impact of debt on Africa's human development indicators it will be possible some day to convince an enlightened leadership to move toward that decision.

Pambazuka: Recently there has been talk of debt swaps. What are debt swaps and are they an effective method of alleviating the debt crisis?

Dembele: Debt swaps are a mechanism by which part of a country's debt is sold by one or several of its creditors (private creditors) to another entity that invests the proceed in the same country. For instance, a commercial bank that seeks to get rid of its loan to a country like Senegal, will sell that loan – generally at a deep discount – to an investor, a corporation, which will use the face value of the debt to invest in a publicly owned company in Senegal. There are several kinds of swaps, such as debt-equity swaps, whereby a corporation that bought part of Senegal's debt uses it to buy shares in an existing state-owned company. This mechanism has been extensively used in Latin America and in a few cases in sub-Saharan Africa. Another type of swap is debt-for-nature, a case in which an environmental group buys a country's debt and uses the proceeds for environmental protection.

Since swaps involve only private debt, it cannot be an effective mechanism for debt alleviation given that almost 90 percent of poor African countries' debt is public. And swaps are a mechanism for transferring public assets to foreign hands. For this reason, it is not a good solution for those countries that have a substantial commercial debt, like Nigeria.

Pambazuka: If the current levels of debt and debt repayment burdens continue, what is the prognosis for African countries over the next ten years?

Dembele: Right now, many African countries are not servicing their debt. Or they do so by incurring new debts. Therefore, if the current levels of debt burden continue, over the next ten years:

- Many African countries may be totally stripped of their sovereignty
- The levels of poverty will worsen and millions of lives will be at risk
- There will be a total collapse of the state and other public institutions
- The Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved.

Pambazuka: Who do people need to target if they are concerned about the debt issue and want to make an impact? Who are the stakeholders?

Dembele: The targets are:

- G8 leaders (major bilateral creditors and masters of the international financial institutions)
- IMF and the World Bank (multilateral debt has overtaken bilateral debt in many cases)
- The Western credit agencies (that guarantee private debts)
- The parliaments of Western countries
- The United Nations system (to take a clear stand on debt cancellation)
- The African governments (to form a united front and eventually move toward debt repudiation).



Violently Intent on Keeping Us in Poverty: International Trade Policy

Riaz Tayob

Pambazuka News 178, 14 October 2004

THE NORTH-SOUTH ECONOMIC and political divide is the overriding concern in international trade relations, with the rich North creating conditions that allow for the pillaging and primitivisation of the poor South. Together, the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) adopt a coherent and comprehensive neo-liberal paradigm for trade and economic management, and this free trade ideology is imposed on developing countries.

There are serious deficiencies in this ideology, which are rarely given any credence, or receive at best grudging acknowledgement. The North uses the free trade ideology as a means of domination over the resources and livelihoods of the people of the South. One does not have to be a radical or a revolutionary to question the merits of their policies; simply looking at the economic history of rich countries is instructive. Do as I say and not as I did is the North's mantra.

The neo-liberal, free trade, Washington Consensus ideology is used as a tool to maintain resource flows from the South to the North. Militarily the colonisers were kicked out of African countries after bloody and horrific struggles. Neo-liberalism replaced military colonial occupation and ensures that resource flows from the South to the North continue. Instead of rule by the gun, it became rule by trade policy. Free trade was used as the ideology to continue to maintain colonial economic relations with the South.

Trade is regulated primarily by the WTO. After the collapse of the WTO Cancun Ministerial meeting, where developing countries refused to be bullied into accepting onerous trade and development terms, the USA and the European Union (EU) indicated that they would pursue regional trading arrangements (RTAs) with countries.

The failure of the economic superpowers to achieve what they desired at the multilateral level must inform our analysis of what they hope to achieve through regional negotiations. Since many issues the North hoped to impose on the South through the WTO were rejected, it is imperative for the South to maintain this consistency in RTA negotiations simply because the issues are not in our interest. However, Southern governments, especially in Africa, are much weaker in regional and bilateral negotiations with the North than they are at the WTO simply because of their extreme (and increasing) dependence on the North.

The rationale for African countries entering into RTAs are complex. There is the overriding perception that RTAs improve a country's economic development because of the alleged link between liberalisation and economic growth. However, a United Nations Development Programme longitudinal study of least developed countries found indications that liberalisation leads to de-industrialisation. One of the main reasons for entering RTAs is that regional bodies have greater representative and market power and may improve parity in bargaining. In order to benefit from the consolidation of representation, one can, wrongly, presume that there is an African regional integration plan that guides efforts in this regard.

The WTO establishes the framework for the implementation of free trade values: liberalisation is the aim of international trade. For an RTA to be WTO compliant it must result in higher levels of economic integration within a reasonable period of time, cover substantially all trade and be more liberalised than the WTO regime. This means that RTAs extend liberalisation commitments even further.

International trade is also impacted upon by the World Bank and the IMF. The IFIs actively promote Washington Consensus values of neo-liberal economics. The principle ideology they impart is that the market allocates resources best and the state should not interfere by creating market distortions. They also promote tariff reductions and trade liberalisation generally, forcing the South to give for free what the North should bargain for in negotiations.

In the context of RTAs it is important to recognise that the combination of these factors indicates that trade policy (and development policy) is externally determined by participation with the IFIs and the WTO. These agreements regulate the development path that is open for countries to follow. The control in many instances is indirect and in many more it is quite direct.

But free trade and liberalisation were not used as policies by the North to reach their current stage of development. The Now Developed Countries (NDCs) used different sets of policies (almost the exact opposite of the Washington Consensus). Free trade and liberalisation are now mantras prescribed under the guise of being pro-development. The North used state power to regulate markets, increase the social wage, create public services, use tariffs as a means of industrial development and control investment flows amongst other measures.

For evaluation of African policies and global engagement, it is therefore revealing enough for us to begin our analysis in comparing the IFI/WTO prescriptions with the policies used by the North previously (historic capitalism), in order to understand what is happening to the South presently, within this form of neo-liberal globalisation. One need not be a revolutionary to see that things in our countries are getting worse or that the policy prescriptions used are so divorced from reality as to be positively harmful.

Neo-liberalism treats all economic activities alike, whereas the North developed by not treating all economic activities alike. Simply put, the North recognised that investing in a casino would have a different developmental impact from say housing construction. This is a distinction the neo-liberal system does not allow governments to make, so for instance subsidies under the WTO can be made to general sectors and not specific industries, or, GATS treats basic health and water services the same as tourism and gambling, when there are clearly qualitative differences.

The neo-liberal ideology also pushes for perfect competition, which is a utopian ideal that has never existed! In the early stages of development, the Northern countries actually pursued anticompetitive policies to assist with their development. In practice, Northern countries followed the principle of protection of industries including infant industries and only opened their markets once a particular level of market dominance/ economies of scale were achieved. This is in direct contradiction to the arguments against infant industry protection and in favour of the consumer welfare effects of liberalisation based on efficiency, which are being shoved onto African developmental agendas. Tariff liberalisation is promoted by the WTO and the IFIs when high tariffs were the primary tool used to develop manufacturing capacity in the North. In other words, the system forces African governments to prefer cheaper imported goods over job creation at a time when unemployment is rife. The recognition that imported goods contain labour is not obvious, and we continue to import labour contained in our imports and make them cheaper by liberalising tariffs.

By using the economic analysis toolbox that the Northern countries themselves used to develop, we see a world that is violently intent on keeping us in poverty in perpetuity. The term violently is not used lightly because at present even an analysis of Africa's chances of pursuing Schumpeterian increasing return activities is heavily constrained by our international commitments, our so-called level of global integration.

Since regional integration is a reality that must be dealt with, national and regional development agendas should, at the very least (but not only), incorporate the view that different economic activities have different impacts on the economy as Schumpeter pointed out. Some activities generate positive returns (manufacturing), others are return neutral (tourism) while resource extraction and primary commodity production (after a point) generate negative/diminishing returns. In order to generate additional revenue for the state, so that it can serve its distributive function to improve the conditions of citizens, any international trade engagement must prioritise increasing return economic activities to promote revenue generation occasioned in part by tariff income losses due to imposed trade liberalisation. The impact of these losses is not discussed adequately in the public domain and there is a presumption that everything will be all right.

The WTO for instance allows tariff escalation. This means that it is cheaper and easier for Africans to export coffee beans than it is to export processed coffee. Therefore Africa does not develop beyond coffee growing. It also allows for tariff peaks that are used to keep out goods where African countries have particular advantage like leather goods. So any move by Africans to develop manufacturing capabilities or to exploit comparative advantage to benefit meaningfully from their products meets with enormous obstacles and disincentives in Northern markets. These obstacles are legal and continue the colonial legacy of forbidding manufacturing in the colonies.

To bring about a change in the developmental pathway for Africa a number of obstacles have to be overcome, the first being the ideology of free trade that contaminates every level of policy making in many countries. Most officials and ministers do not know they do not know or are politically helpless in the face of free trade ideology.

The principles of free trade which are presented as inherently good are unsurprisingly absent in the North's approach to agriculture. In agriculture free trade is turned on its head, because the WTO allows the North to use trade distorting subsidies – state intervention that distorts the market: the ultimate free trade sin. So the system is schizophrenic: it prescribes a host of ideologies to govern trade in our countries (and thereby our development) but fails to apply it consistently in areas of interest to the South.

Because our governments are being pragmatic, they do not see the systemic and structural violence it creates and unleashes on our people. Over 70 per cent of Africans rely on agriculture as a means of living, yet they are prevented from using this comparative advantage. South Africa in particular is giving the land back to black people but is forcing these farmers to compete with subsidised European and American imports. This is a recipe for disaster.

Many governments in Africa, however, are adopting the view that the more RTAs they belong to, the more beneficial it will be to their economies. But, for instance, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is estimated to reduce Namibia's revenue by between 31 and 50 per cent over the next 12 years (and these exclude the dynamic effects!). A plethora of agreements would further reduce income. This is not simply a matter for trade negotiators; it has serious implications for governmental stability especially at a time when debt levels are rising exponentially. Money for much needed social welfare is simply not going to be available because most governments rely heavily on international trade taxes for revenue.

At present though, the international trade context within which African countries operate is skewed against them because increasing return activities:

- Do not enjoy meaningful market access in export markets (especially in areas where we have comparative advantage)
- Do not have sufficiently protected domestic markets to promote

entrepreneurship and local development

- Suffer from supply side constraints
- Face continually declining commodity/primary goods prices and unfair competition in agriculture
- Are prevented through whimsical barriers to market entry in foreign countries.

Africa's openness to foreign goods and services within the domestic market is a problem. Africa is the continent that is most open to global trade. This means that even in the domestic market, local manufacturers must compete with transnational corporations. African manufacturers are expected to survive without protection from the state. We are trying to compete through exports in highly organised foreign markets while surrendering our home turf and losing out in both. The policies imposed on us simply do not make sense. Africa has slavishly followed most of the prescriptions of the former colonial powers with a spectacularly tragic outcome. If most of what we are doing is so different from what the North did and things are getting worse, then it is time to look at alternatives. There are other views on development that are simply not canvassed at all by our governments. If African governments are to prosper economically and politically, we need to at least begin to look at the policies used in the past by the now rich countries. If our governments fail to even consider some of these alternatives, then democratic government or not, it is a sad day. It is even sadder when these free trade conditions are imposed by many honourable and dedicated leaders who suffered greatly to bring us liberation (Nelson Mandela included), only to compound our people's material destitution.



NEPAD: South Africa, African Economies and Globalisation

Henning Melber

Pambazuka News 141, 29 Jan 2004

WITH ITS SUCCESSFUL democratic transition, South Africa emerged during the second half of the 1990s as a new political and economic factor on the continent. Within this process, Thabo Mbeki's foreign policy approach could be characterised as 'a complicated and sometimes contradictory mixture of ideology, idealism and pragmatism' (Gerrit Olivier in *International Affairs*, no. 4/2003). South Africa's Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, in a keynote address to the German Foundation for International Development, characterised as early as December 1998 the emerging South African strategy in a revealing way by asserting 'there is a new resilience and a new will to succeed in the African continent. We in South Africa have called it a renaissance, a new vision of political and economic renewal. It takes the global competitive marketplace as point of departure.'

Such understanding gave birth to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), for which Thabo Mbeki and his team can be considered to be the midwives (if not fathers – due to the absence of women in the male dominated process). NEPAD has managed to obtain – after some diplomatic manoeuvring and a number of strategic compromises – the blessings of the African Union and subsequently the United Nations General Assembly. It can be considered as a blue print for Africa's further socio-economic integration into the dominant global market.

Critical assessments of this strategy, which had been successfully promoted as the development paradigm by a number of African governments with the backing of the G8, have pointed out that its concept blends nicely into the neo-liberal mainstream of globalisation. It is fully in line with the economic strategy of South Africa's present government, seeking closer integration into the dominant structures of the world economy. As Ian Taylor and Philip Nel have warned (in *Third World Quarterly*, no. 1/2002), the inherent danger of such a strategic move might lie in the message that it serves to legitimise instead of aiming to restructure the existing global power relations, to which African countries have been a victim. They further articulate the suspicion that the driving force behind such a policy might be the 'linkage between globalisation, export-driven trade policies and a nascent transnational elite', and maintain that 'making neoliberalism somehow "work for all", rather than rethinking the overall global trading system, is the key strategy of South Africa particularly and New Africa more generally'.

As if to confirm this, South Africa's Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel, in his capacity as the chairman of the development committee to the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey on 18 March 2002 stated: 'There is general consensus that globalisation provides an opportunity for countries to improve standards of living, but it's not an end in itself ... The key challenge is to attempt to manage globalisation in such a way that it does lead to poverty reduction' (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/ffd253b.htm>). But clearly so, NEPAD will not be able to replace demands for a fair share in the world's resources by those who have been the victims of domination and exploitation for far too long. At best it might be able to slightly increase the far too tiny piece shared from the global cake with stakeholders in Africa (stakeholders should in this context of course read as shareholders). Instead of a meaningful radical alternative, NEPAD seems to be much closer to 'more of the same' – namely capitalism as a new form of global apartheid, as Patrick Bond keeps on warning in his recent writings. Along similar lines, Ian Taylor reminds us of the active role elites in the South have played in this recent process of capitalist expansion termed (misleadingly) 'globalisation' by supporting the new Washington Consensus, resulting in the promotion of the liberalisation of trade and capital movements. It remains to be seen, from the point of view of those outside of these elites, if there is any substance in the pragmatism which argues: better this capitalism than no capitalism at all.

Such affirmative response to re-structuring the access to potential resources among others through a 'trade as aid' paradigm has been articulated by the South African Foreign Minister Dlamini Zuma in an address on 22 March 2002 to the University of Alberta, in which she had the following to offer: 'To the private sector, the continent of Africa is endowed with the human capital, mineral wealth and unlimited opportunities for trade, investment and partnership as proposed in the NEPAD programme. Other countries are taking advantage of this burgeoning market; it is imperative that you are not left behind. The opportunities abound in Africa.' (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/unal253a.htm>) She did not need to send such a message to the capital at home: the windows of opportunity had already been discovered by the big companies operating from a South African base.

There is massive expansion of South African capital into the continent of hitherto unprecedented dimensions. This is illustrated in a chapter written by John Daniel/Varusha Naidoo and Sanusha Naidu to the 'State of the Nation' volume for 2003-2004, published by the Human Sciences Research Council. Its title says it all: 'The South Africans have arrived'. And an article in the *Financial Times* (17 November 2003) identifies 'a strategic shift by South African businesses' through companies 'striking out in search of bigger profit margins in their backyard'. Already since 1991 South Africa has been the largest foreign direct investor (with an annual average of \$ 1.4 billion) within

the continent. Large scale operations are undertaken by a variety of private companies as well as (ex-)parastatals, ranging from Spoornet and Portnet via Eskom and Sasol to South African Airways. MTN and Vodacom also compete as operators in the telecommunication business abroad and invest in the potentially huge markets of Nigeria and the DRC. Financial institutions such as Standard Bank join the 'traditional' multinationals in the mining sector, which have a long-standing experience in seeking other profitable opportunities to accumulate further.

Presumably greener pastures are explored and invaded by the local giants in the wholesale and retail business. South African chain stores mushroom all over the continent, South African Breweries owns and controls large parts of the beverage sector elsewhere. This penetration of neighbouring and continental markets goes hand in hand with the particular pro-active role of South Africa in engaging in and addressing international trade issues through a strategic involvement of the ministers for trade and for finance respectively in the current efforts to modify the global economy under the WTO. It is complemented by a parallel intensification of South-South cooperation seeking the consolidation of an alliance between the economically more powerful transitional economies such as South Africa, Brazil, India and China.

The South African economist Stephen Gelb, previously member of Thabo Mbeki's team drafting the original policy documents preceding NEPAD, reminded in a recent analysis published by his Edge Institute of the South African president's earlier approach. In a 1997 speech the then-Deputy President referred to the need for South Africa 'to "walk on two legs" in its foreign policy – to cultivate strong relations with the South, as well as strategic relations with the industrialised countries'. Gelb concludes, that NEPAD:

is grounded in the full realities of South Africa's relations with the continent, including those beyond its immediate regional neighbourhood in Southern Africa. At the same time it is also grounded in the realities of globalisation, especially the unevenness of its impact amongst and within nations, and reflects an attempt to shift the continent, including South Africa itself, towards a more effective engagement.

More radical critics, who had opted to remain outside of the centres of political and economic power in present South Africa, speak out more directly. This is among others reflected in a number of articles published in the South African Labour Bulletin (no. 3/2003) under the thematic title 'NEPAD – a wish to build a dream on'. They suggest from a more or less critical distance that NEPAD offers the opportunity for South African capital to expand further in Africa by creating new market access. NEPAD is hence considered as a lubricant for a South African expansion into other parts of the continent, which under an Apartheid regime until the early 1990s would have not been con-

ceivable. Almost ironically, only a politically correct post-Apartheid government allows the promotion of and greases a process, which is again (though not exclusively) to the benefit of those who already profited from the previous undemocratic system at home and can now enter spaces abroad.

Confronted with this view on occasion of a public NEPAD seminar in Stockholm (held on 9 October 2003 during the 3rd meeting of the Swedish-South African Binational Commission) the South African Vice President Jacob Zuma and the Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad seemed not amused. Their responses suggested that they perceive the South African type of capitalism as better suited for African conditions than other forms of capitalism (or no capitalism at all), and by no means a problem. The suggestion that the (class) struggle continues also in democratic South Africa was brushed aside as another example of notorious 'ultra-leftism'. But maybe they should join in with Robert Zimmermann (aka Bob Dylan) to intone the classical refrain 'and the times, they are a-changing' – or, for that matter, admit that they (the times) haven't changed as much as one might have thought a couple of years ago that they would.



From Partition to Re-Unification: 120 Years Since the Partition of Africa

Rotimi Sankore

Pambazuka News 187, 16 December 2004

THE 120th ANNIVERSARY of Africa's partition passed largely unmarked in November 2004. While some no doubt would wonder what the significance of this is today those that are aware of the partition and its implications will be able to see its negative implications for Africa's development and parallels with Cold War era Balkanisation of the world into East versus West spheres of influence. Some would even argue that Hitler's brazen land grab or policy of 'Lebensraum' in which the Nazis claimed expansionism and conquest was vital for the continued political and economic development of Germany sprang from the objectives of the Berlin Conference. Without doubt, however, the goal of the Berlin Conference was to consolidate expansionism for resources and markets through negotiation rather than war.

Globalisation came to Africa via the transatlantic slave trade about 500 years before the term became 'sexy' or was even coined. This massive plundering and abuse of Africa's most valuable resource – its citizens – provided millions of slave workers and stupendous profits for the forerunners of many of today's multi-million dollar business empires and their countries of origin. The equivalent present day would be to have today's multinationals backed by states forcibly recruiting millions to work in factories and industries as slave labour for 400 years with absolutely no pay beyond food and water supported by floggings, amputations and hangings to keep the workers in line. The idea is not far fetched. The creation of an artificial class of non-persons by way of demonising Jews created the slave labour for the companies behind the Nazi war production machine. If six million perished in Germany and some parts of Europe within six years in a state policy partially hidden from society but subsequently exposed, think what could have happened over a period of 400 years of unrestricted savagery by numerous states and a clearer picture emerges of the most savage, violent, and comprehensive mass violation of rights in human history.

Some 'experts' squabble over whether Africa lost 25, 50 or a 100 million to this bestial policy sanctioned by states, and use various criteria to compute varying figures – abductees that actually arrived alive at slave plantations, those that ended up at the bottom of the ocean, those that died resisting, those that died as a result of displacement and its consequences such as disease and hunger, children that died after losing their families, etc. This is beside the point. Not only were millions in their youth and productive prime lost, mil-

lions more were psychologically destroyed and displaced and most importantly the development of society was more or less suspended for 400 years. We only need to look at the impact of the holocaust on Jews, or the current Darfur crisis to see what state-sanctioned policies of destruction of a people can do to the stability, development and psychology of peoples and their societies.

But this is not the main focus of this write up. The significance of the above is that it was against this background that the partition of Africa – a continuation of the policy of plundering by other means – from human to natural resources – was enforced. The Berlin Conference of 1884 formalised the scramble for and partition of Africa by colonial powers. The conference was hosted by the German government of Otto Von Bismarck and led to Africa being carved up for the exploitation of its resources along the lines of modern day gangsters dividing cities into market spheres of influence to avoid arbitrary gang warfare that is bad for 'business'.

By the end of the conference of 13 European powers and the United States, the template had been laid down for the creation or superimposition of roughly 50 countries, the majority of which cut arbitrarily across the logic of nationality, geography, language or other uniting factors. The then major players were Britain, Germany, France, and Portugal, which between them already controlled most of the coastal territories where forts were established to protect trading companies. Belgium, Italy and Spain played supporting roles with the others haggling in vain for crumbs. The broad division that resulted was:

- Hosts Germany grabbed Namibia (German Southwest Africa) and Tanzania (German East Africa), Togoland, some of Cameroon and Benin
- Great Britain pressed its naval and military advantage and secured Egypt, parts of Sudan, Uganda and Kenya (or British East Africa), most of southern Africa including South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe (or Rhodesia), Botswana and significant areas of West Africa especially Nigeria and Ghana (Gold Coast)
- Belgium and King Leopold II held tight to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, then known as the Belgian Congo)
- France secured most of western and central Africa, then known as French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa and later some of North Africa
- Portugal took Mozambique and Angola
- Italy got Somalia (Italian Somaliland) and a portion of Ethiopia
- While Spain made do with the smallest territory – Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni).

The negative impact of the partition on Africa could not have been lost on the colonial powers especially Bismarck of Germany whose entire 40-year political career was devoted to the unification of Germanic states including fighting three wars including the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 and executing an endless series of diplomatic manoeuvres that played his neighbours

against each other. (The subsequent defeat of Germany in the First and Second World Wars led to the loss of its colonies)

For the 'natives' already disoriented by the slave trade and its consequences, expansionism, protectorates and artificial states not only meant the denial of the right to self determination, it meant suppression and containment by state machineries designed for colonial rule. Colonial economies were not designed to develop the colonies but rather to create wealth for the colonial powers. An entire legislative framework and state apparatus was specifically designed to ensure that 'the law' crushed any signs of dissidence. Sedition, criminal defamation, insult laws, states of emergency, detention without trial, pass laws, etc, became key instruments of control by colonial authorities or white minority governments in southern Africa. These frameworks and culture of intolerance for opposing views were largely inherited by many African states and laid the foundation of the institutional abuse of rights in many modern African countries today.

It is utterly impossible to sustain human rights within the context of unviable states, failed states, or states perpetually in a state of conflict either because they are an artificial construct with ruling elites based very narrowly on ethnic, language, racial or other artificial divisions. Also, the artificial borders created by the partition of Africa broke apart ethnic nationalities and in many cases fused them artificially with others nationalities within new states. Ruling elites were cultivated either from minorities or majorities or artificially created and sustained using the army and or police. These divide and conquer policies were unsustainable indefinitely and it was just a matter of time before conflicts broke out over political or economic domination. In some countries, the process of independence leading to the withdrawal of colonial powers served as the trigger for long suppressed divisions to boil over. Either way, the entire construct of these states was aimed at exploiting and violating the rights of citizens.

By the time of independence, many African countries were stuck with these artificial constructs and a change of guard offered no solution. Not insignificantly, the independence era coincided with the cold war era and any leaders actually asserting independence were promptly labelled communists and dispatched via coups, murder or both. Some countries such as the DRC are yet to recover from the consequences of such interference and disruption that led to the murder of its elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and the imposition of Mobutu. If, as in the case of Ghana's Nkrumah, new leaders actually advocated African unity and a reversal of the colonial borders and fiefdoms of new political leaders then other insecure African governments anxious to maintain the status quo opposed them. Where soldiers were not directly prompted to seize power, the fragile nature of many states and their non-productive nature meant that in the struggle for political power, the most organised and best

armed body of men would inevitably become aware of their potential power and sweep squabbling politicians aside. The assumption of power by armies largely trained to serve colonial interests by holding down populations could only lead to more institutional violation of rights. Despite their occasional anti-imperialist posturing and theatrics designed to confuse issues and consolidate their hold on power, this was the true nature of the Mobutus and Idi Amins.

The Cold War also resulted in prolonging the life of white minority rule in southern Africa as the liberation movements were seen as pro-communist or socialist and the white minority governments pro west and pro-capitalist. Cold War rivals sustained all sorts of undemocratic governments of the left, right or centrist kind, as Africa once again became an arena of conflict.

In other words, the interruption of social, economic and political development by four centuries of slavery, the repressive legislative frameworks, state apparatus, institutions and culture created by colonial authorities, the non-productive nature of many economies, the unviability of others, artificially constructed states, long periods of military or civilian dictatorships that plundered the countries, the Cold War fall out and so forth have all combined to create the present political culture and political economy which prevails in much of Africa and makes it difficult if not impossible to uphold human rights in a sustainable form.

Any move away from this past which had as its central feature the institutional violation of rights must therefore have as its new central feature, the institutional promotion of rights. Its not a coincidence that the new African Union has emerged in a decade that has seen more elections in Africa than in the last 40 to 50 years of independence of most Africa countries. In the case of some southern African countries, independence was only won in the last 10 to 20 years. Compared to the relative 600 to 700 years of stability and development in Europe only accelerated or held back by revolution or war for certain periods its easy to see why Africa remains the least developed continent despite its potential. The context becomes clearer in comparison with the Asian colonies which had their civilisations, cultures and developmental trajectories affected by decades of colonialism – but crucially not suspended or destroyed by 400 years of slavery followed by carving up and imposition of mostly artificial states. The result is that Asia has an unbroken sense of history and culture and recovered quickly but not yet completely from colonialism. In the case of China and Japan, the results of the relative lack of disruption are clear to see. Were it not for the immortality of the pyramids, mummification techniques that indicate advancements in medical science and undeniable archaeological evidence of several African civilisations thousands of years older than many European and Asian civilisations, Africa and civilisation would never be mentioned in the same breath. As it stands, Hollywood is still

in denial as evidenced by its continuous portrayal of ancient Egypt by white actors. This travesty and violation of historical and cultural rights can only be equalled by a spectacle of African actors portraying ancient Greece, Rome or China without any sense of irony.

The largely unbroken development of Europe over the last few centuries also explains why modern day European military dictatorships such as Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal or more recently in Greece and the Balkans did not fundamentally upset the development of those societies even though some of them and Franco in particular lasted over 30 years – longer than most African dictatorships. Even where as in the case of Hitler and Mussolini dictatorship and war led to destruction, the Marshall plan with its more or less free billions of dollars reconstructed and even gave impetus to the further development of those societies.

Most importantly and not surprisingly, major European governments subsequently came to the conclusion that the creation of a European Union would help break the cycle of wars and conflict in Europe and create the developmental basis for future socio-economic and political stability. At the heart of this today is the promotion of European-level core rights instruments, which provide more protection to citizens than the rights regimes in many individual countries hence the tendency to resort to the European Courts for the protection of rights, denied in-country. 'I will go to Europe' has become a fashionable slang by many that feel cheated and unprotected.

The adoption of several rights based treaties and protocols by the new African Union is a step in the right direction and the recent declaration of a treaty signing week within the last month shows that the Commission of the African Union in particular clearly understands the role that promotion of rights can play in the development of modern society. The mission, vision and strategic plan promoted by the commission's current Chair Professor Alpha Konare are evidence of this. It is far from clear, however, that many African governments understand this as evidenced by the lethargy towards signing, ratifying and institutionalising instruments that will enhance the protection of rights such as the African Court of Human Rights /Court of Justice and the Protocol for the Protection of Rights of Women. This trend must be reversed. The broad sketches of African and world history and development above demonstrate that nowhere on the planet is the institutionalisation of rights more crucial to development than in Africa.

The political integration of Africa is aimless and doomed unless done on a rights basis that reverses hundreds of years of a largely imposed political culture of rights abuses, which can in turn unleash its creative and developmental potential. The protection of rights can also not be sustained on the basis of underdevelopment. Governments largely based on exploitation and the preservation of ruling elites, or that preside over underdeveloped societies

tend to deny free expression and core rights of association, assembly, political participation and ignore key economic and social rights such as health care, housing, food security and so forth. The summary and core of the rights imperative is that all societies need these rights to develop and cannot develop further without the protection of these rights.



The Challenges Before Africa and the African Union

Rotimi Sankore and Firoze Manji
Pambazuka News 112, 29 May 2003

THE CHALLENGES FACING the African continent are enormous. On every front – economic and industrial development; scientific and technological know how; electrification; agriculture; education; healthcare; housing; telecommunications; transport; peace and stability; institutional respect for social, economic, political and human rights – and on all other indices of modern society the continent is yet to fulfil its potential. The reasons for this have been articulated extensively – 400 years of vicious slavery and colonisation including the murder of millions of Africans in their prime, decades of military coups and dictatorships of all sorts backed by both ‘Eastern and Western bloc’ countries in the Cold War battle for strategic interests and resources, etc. These are terrible events, which would have undermined the development of any continent

Nevertheless, present day African governments are still failing in their duty to break the shackles imposed on their countries by the injustices of the past and guide their countries into the 21st century.

On 25 May the African Union celebrated the 40th anniversary of Africa Liberation Day and the formation of the Organisation of African Unity. The 26 May was also the second anniversary of the formal creation of the African Union. In his anniversary message, the current chair of the union President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa saluted:

the distinguished leaders of the continental struggle such as Kwame Nkrumah, Gamel Abdel Nasser, Haille Selassie, Mmandi Azikiwe, Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Kenneth Kaunda, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Augustino Neto, Samora Machel, Amilcar Cabral, Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and many others ... [and their] Pan-Africanist vision of a Union of African States sharing common aims of multicultural unity, socio-economic and political co-operation and development, the promotion of human rights, the protection of human rights and freedoms, the promotion of peace and stability and the removal of the remaining yokes of colonialism and apartheid on the continent.

He also acknowledged that ‘there are new issues on our agenda today such as democracy, peace and stability, human security, good economic governance as well as sustainable development, human rights, health, gender equality,

information and computer technology, integrated regional development, cultural and heritage preservation and promotion.'

More importantly, he admitted that:

The international community is eager to see whether we will be able to live up to the conditions that we have set ourselves in NEPAD and its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in which we have designed measures to assist states where capacity gaps exist and to set benchmarks of excellence for a vibrant and progressive Africa ... We, in Africa are optimistic that a new dawn is breaking and that prosperity, peace and human security will be a reality rather than a figment of our imagination.

But rather disappointingly, the first tasks that African Union has set for itself do not take account of President Mbeki's fine words. Instead, the Executive Council meeting of the AU attended by foreign ministers of all 53 member-states of the African Union met last week to 'consider issues' relating to the implementation of decisions taken by heads of state and government during the launch of the African Union regarding 'Common African Defence and Security Policy; the new structure of the Commission; progress report on the election of the AU Commissioners; scale of assessment for member-states; and the link between the AU and the African Diaspora.'

This distinguished gathering of ministers did not think it necessary to respond to the urgent issues such as warnings by the World Food Programme of looming food shortages and famine in several African countries including Angola, Congo Brazzaville, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, where various estimates of between 30 million and 40 million people are at risk of starvation.

By no coincidence, the governments of these countries have been identified by several international and African organisations as suppressing press freedom and freedom of expression. In almost all cases, the rights to association, assembly and political participation have also been curtailed.

There also seems to be no collective awareness of other grim facts and statistics hanging like a sword of Damocles over of millions of Africans:

- Of the ten countries in the world spending the least on healthcare, only one – Tajikistan – is not African. Liberia, Burundi, Somalia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Central African Republic and Chad top this list
- Of the ten most undernourished nations in the world only three – Afghanistan, North Korea and Haiti – are not African. The other seven are Somalia, Burundi, Eritrea, Dem Republic of Congo, Liberia and Niger
- The ten countries in the world with the highest death rate, and lowest life expectancy are all African: Botswana; Mozambique; Zimbabwe; Swaziland; Angola; Namibia; Malawi; Niger; Zambia; and Rwanda make up the first list

with Sierra Leone, Burundi, Djibouti, swapping places with Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe on the second list

- Of the ten countries in the world with the youngest populations (normally characterised by high death rates and high birth rates) nine are African: Uganda; DRC; Chad; Niger; Sao Tome and Principe; Ethiopia; Burkina Faso; Mali and Benin
- Of the ten most corrupt countries in the world, five – Nigeria, Uganda, Cameroon, Kenya and Tanzania – are African
- The ten countries in the world that are worst for education are all African: Niger; Burkina Faso; Sierra Leone; Guinea; Ethiopia; Angola; Mali; Mozambique; Senegal; Burundi and Guinea Bissau
- Not surprisingly, eight of the ten countries on the planet with the highest rates of illiteracy are African: Niger, Burkina Faso; Gambia; Ethiopia; Senegal; Mali; Mauritania and Sierra Leone (the other two being Afghanistan and Haiti)
- Yet, Africa seems to be heading full steam towards a housing catastrophe with ten of the fastest growing countries in the world being African: Niger; Somalia; Angola; Uganda; Liberia; Burkina Faso; Mali; Ethiopia and DRC.

It is therefore no surprise that malaria is estimated to kill one million people per year (or 2,800 per day) in Africa. HIV/AIDS kills an estimated two million people each year. Add to these the numerous ongoing conflicts claiming hundreds of thousands of lives every year (estimated at more than three million in DRC alone over the last three years) and it will be no exaggeration to say that Africa may well descend into a wasteland of conflict, disease and poverty if the trend is not reversed over the next few decades. But 2020 or 2040 are not so far away. It was only 'yesterday' that the 1970s and 1980s targets for 'everything for all' by the year 2000 were set without any clear arrangement to achieve these targets, and today it is 2003.

The ongoing SARS epidemic is yet to take a thousand lives globally but was placed at the fore of a recent meeting of Asian countries. The Canadian authorities were reported on 29 May to have decided to quarantine 5,000 persons at risk from the SARS virus. Yet the AU does not think the healthcare crisis facing Africa deserves to be fast tracked to the fore of its agenda. The right to life is after all the most important of all. To describe the African healthcare crisis as a result of criminal negligence would not be an exaggeration.

To anyone familiar with the political and economic history of Africa, the surprise is not that these statistics exist. The surprise is that there is no cohesive plan to reverse the trend.

The task of rebuilding the continent must therefore begin immediately. Improved education, healthcare, dealing urgently with the tragedy of HIV/AIDS, agriculture, scientific and technological development, housing, conflict resolution, peace and stability, and so forth must be accelerated to the

fore of the AU's agenda. Unfortunately, this seems unlikely to happen unless African civil society makes every effort to ensure it is done.

But before any of these can happen, freedom of expression and freedom of association needs to be institutionalised. Nothing can happen without these. Only last week we witnessed the absurdity of a Moroccan editor being sentenced to four years in jail for publishing a satirical weekly which 'insulted the King of Morocco.' Such absurdities belong in the feudal past of humanity and have no place in the modern world. Yet Morocco is not alone. Eritrea one of the first few countries to sign the constitutive act of the African Union has imprisoned 18 editors and journalists and banned the entire private media. In July, 53 African heads of state will gather in Maputo for a meeting of the African Union. At least two thirds of them possess a plethora of anti-media and anti-freedom of expression laws in the armouries employed to stifle debate and alternative opinion.

Last week, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Africa Liberation Day, CREDO wrote to President Mbeki asking him to 'call on fellow African leaders to release all incarcerated journalists, repeal all anti-media and anti-free-expression laws and legislation in their countries and end the persecution of journalists, civil society and peaceful democratic opposition.' The letter also urged him to 'act speedily and decisively on these issues and to ensure they are firmly on the agenda of the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union planned for Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003.' The letter stressed that 'an end to the suppression of press freedom, freedom of expression and the rights to assembly, association and political participation will be a first and crucial step' towards solving the problems facing Africa.

